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Teachers in Adventist Schools in North America and the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

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16. Teachers in Adventist Schools in North America and the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Robert K. McIver

Avondale University College

In 1860 the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church made a decision to adopt its current name (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000, p. 91–95) but it was not until 1980, after another 120 years had passed, that the Church formally adopted 27 fundamental beliefs. It is not hard to find a reason for this delay. Most of the believers who first called themselves Seventh-day Adventists had experienced difficult relationships with the churches to which they had belonged because these churches had resisted the message promulgated by the Millerites predicting the return of Christ in 1844, and had terminated the memberships of many of them. The creeds of the church were sometimes invoked in these decisions (Wright, 1977, p. 50). In addition, some in the movement had come from denominations that already were suspicious of creeds (Kidder, 2009, p. 102–3). J. N. Loughborough summarized much of the thinking among early SDAs when he said:

[T]he first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And, fifth, to commence persecution against such. (Smith, 1861, p. 148; also cited Campbell, 2016, p. 99)

Hostility against creeds lasted several generations within Adventism. The slogan of the Christian connection, “the Bible the

only creed” (Kidder, 2009, p. 102), repeated by James White in his reply to Loughborough (Smith, 1861, p. 148), found a ready home in Adventist thinking. Indeed, the first words of the 2015 version of Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists are, “Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed.”

Anti-creedalism has led to some highly interesting and convoluted maneuvering as this set of unofficial beliefs of the church was developed and included in the official documentation of the church, all without being voted at a General Conference of the SDA Church (GC). The GC vote had to be avoided, because to do so was seen to be taking a major step towards setting up a creed.

Even though early Adventists eschewed a creed, there was still a need for a list of the kinds of beliefs that joined them together. If nothing else, there was a need to answer inquiries about what the early SDA Church believed. One of the more elaborate early attempts to produce such a list was a set of “Fundamental Principles” written by Uriah Smith and published by the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association in Battle Creek, Michigan (Olson & Haloviak, 1978, p. 7–10). Uriah Smith was long-standing editor of the *Review and Herald* at the time he wrote his list of Fundamental Principles. The first few articles of Smith’s “Principles” reflect the layout and much of the content of similar statements of belief used by contemporaneous Christian groups in the American Mid-west (Fortin, 1998, p. 63–64). It follows the sequence, I. God, II. Jesus Christ; III. The Holy Scriptures. The statement about Jesus Christ, “the Son of the Eternal Father,” emphasized his high priestly ministry, which is perhaps a particularly Adventist touch, but most of the rest of the content of the first three paragraphs would have been non-controversial to many outside of the SDA Church. The content of the rest of the “Principles” has a particularly Adventist flavor. Principles of prophetic interpretation are laid out (VI & VII), a defense of the Adventist understanding of 1844 is made (IX & X), and the Sabbath is mentioned (XII).

Smith was not the last to author a statement of beliefs in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, but rather than follow all the variations, we can move forward to the next moment of major significance in the development of the fundamental beliefs: the decision made by the General Conference Committee on December 29, 1930, that a statement of beliefs should appear in the *Yearbook*.

The *Yearbook* was (and is) a publication that listed the various entities of the SDA Church and those who were holding key responsibilities. It was therefore the nearest thing to an official document of the whole Church. The committee minutes noted that the occasion for this decision was a request from the African division for such a set of beliefs to be made formally available, “since they feel that such a statement would help government officials and others to a better understanding of our work” (Olson, 1978, p. 19). A committee was set up, consisting of M. E. Kern (associate secretary of the GC), F. M. Wilcox (editor of the *Review*), E. R. Palmer (manager of the *Review* and Herald Publishing Association) and C. H. Watson (GC President) (Whidden, Moon & Reeve, 2002, p. 199). The statement, largely authored by C. H. Watson, and reviewed by no other group aside from the initial committee of four, appeared in the *Yearbook* without fanfare or challenge. Called the “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists,” the statement was expressed in numbered paragraphs. It begins with a statement about God (paragraph 1.) and is followed by two statements about Jesus (2. & 3.), the second of which is a resounding affirmation of a trinitarian understanding of the nature of Jesus, using some of the technical language of the creeds of the early Christian Church. It starts by proclaiming “That Jesus Christ is very God, being of the same nature and essence as the Eternal Father ...” (Olson, 1978, p. 20) and continues in a similar manner.

The statement in the *Yearbook* was gradually edited and modified, but it was never voted at a General Conference session. This was to change in the late 1970s, when there was an administrative push to take a revised set of fundamental beliefs to the 1980 General Conference session for a vote. A committee was set up in 1978, chaired by W. Duncan Eva, a General Conference vice-president, to work on a revised draft of the fundamental beliefs. Their revised draft included some changes that they considered to be of significance. Thus, once a document thought worth circulating was available, Eva set up a meeting with nine members of the faculty of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary to gain their approval and input. At a meeting on September 12, 1979, several members of the committee expressed concern about things they considered to be weaknesses in the revised set of Fundamental Beliefs. The team at the Seminary asked for others to be added to their number and they took it upon themselves to produce a completely re-written set of fundamental

beliefs (Geraty, 1980, p. 3–6). It was the set of entirely new Fundamental Beliefs developed by the academics at the theological seminary that was eventually circulated and, after being edited in the light of responses from various parts of the world SDA Church, was presented to the 1980 General Conference session (see also, Trim, Forthcoming). On April 25, 1980, the “27 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church” was accepted by vote. The General Conference Bulletin records that “The motion was carried overwhelmingly” (Wilson, Baasch & Bothe, 1980, p. 22).

Since 1980 there have been one major and several minor revisions to the wording of the Fundamental Beliefs. The major revision included adding a whole new “belief,” (11. Growing in Christ), so that after 2015 there were 28 Fundamental Beliefs, not 27. The rationale for the addition of a new fundamental belief was provided in the document, “The Fundamental Beliefs and ‘Growing in Christ,’” which was published in *Ministry* magazine in June 2004. According to this document,

The proposed new fundamental belief has two main purposes. First, it explicitly addresses Christian growth in order to exclude eastern transcendental meditation as a spiritual exercise that is incompatible with the gospel of salvation through Christ. Second, it proclaims freedom through Christ from demonic powers to demonstrate that seeking help and guidance from them in our spiritual growth is not only unnecessary but totally incompatible with the work of Jesus on our behalf. (p. 25)

In many parts of the world, demonic activity, even possession, is a live issue in some Adventist Churches. The church in NAD is growing by emigration from parts of the world where belief in spirits, etc., is common, and so what might not have been an issue for the Schools in NAD may well become one. Thus, teachers’ perspectives on the spirits are important. The full text of the new article of belief, number 11, is found later in this chapter, and will receive further commentary there.

Since they were voted in 1980, the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have been widely accepted. While not formally a creed, they tend to define the boundaries of orthodox Adventism. They have had many uses. For example, they form the structure of books explaining Adventist beliefs, such as *Seventh-day Adventists Believe ... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental*

Doctrines (Ministerial Association, 1988) and *Meaning for the New Millennium: The Christian Faith from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective* (McIver & Roennfeldt, Eds., 2000), as well as forming the themes of many articles in official church publications. They are usually mapped to the curriculum of students preparing for ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In other words, the Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists have become a touchstone, something by which to measure how closely aligned an individual is with the general tenor of the church’s understanding of Scripture. They are not a creed, though!

The 28 Fundamental Beliefs and the Survey of Teachers

As the survey was being prepared, the questions were mapped against the 28 fundamental beliefs of the church. The result is found in Table 16.1.

**Table 16.1 Coverage of Fundamental Beliefs:
Explicit [and Implicit]**

| Heading of Fundamen-tal Belief | Question(s) |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. [Holy Scriptures] | [Q64/Q91 Which statement about the Bible comes closest to your own view? Q65/Q92 The statement that is closest to your understanding of what the Bible is ... Q48/Q70/Q88 When it comes to questions of right and wrong, which of the following do you look to ...] |
| 2. Trinity | Q62o/Q86g I believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (i.e. I believe in the doctrine of the Trinity) |
| 3. Father | Q62b/Q86a I believe in a personal God who seeks a relationship with human beings [62, 86] |
| 4. Son | Q62c/Q86b Jesus Christ is the Son of God |
| 5. [Holy Spirit] | [Q62o/Q86g I believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (i.e. I believe in the doctrine of the Trinity)] |
| 6. Creation | Q62p/Q86h I believe God created the world Q62q I believe God created the world in exactly six days of 24 hours each Q62r I believe God created the world in the recent past (e.g. within the last 6,000 to 15,000 years) [Negative] Q62s I believe the world is millions of years old [Negative] Q62t Evolution is the best explanation for the origins of human life on earth |
| 7. Nature of Man | Q76d/Q93d When a person dies their body remains in the grave and their soul sleeps until the resurrection |

| Heading of Fundamen-tal Belief | Question(s) |
|---|--|
| 8. Great Controversy | Q76a/Q93a All humanity is involved in a GREAT CONTROVERSY between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His love, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe |
| [9. Life, death and resurrection of Christ] | [Q62g I believe that Jesus was born of a virgin] |
| 10. Experience of salvation | Q62f/Q86c I am saved the moment I believe and accept what Jesus has done for me Q62d I will make it to heaven only if I have a personal relationship with Jesus Q67 Which of the following is something you would say in answer to the question, "Are you saved?" [Goal of Church] Q5f Lead people to accept Jesus as their personal Savior [Negative] Q62i I will not get to heaven unless I obey God's law [Negative] Q62k I can only be saved through the Church [Negative] Q62a I should be all right in the end if I am a morally good person |
| 11. Growing in Christ | Q18 Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services? Q56a Pray outside of attending religious services Q56b Participate in prayer groups, Scripture study groups or religious education programs Q56c Read Scripture outside of religious services Q56d Meditate Q56e Share your faith / beliefs with non-believers or people from other religious backgrounds Q49 How important is religion in your life? Q39 The best times in my life have usually been when I have been helping others Q56f Feel a deep sense of spiritual peace and well-being Q51 Have you ever received a definite answer to a specific prayer request? Q50a Miracles still occur today as in ancient times C52. Have you ever experienced or witnessed a divine healing of an illness or injury? Q51b Angels and demons are active in the world [Negative] Q62l The Devil or Satan is not a living being but is a symbol of evil [Q17 Are you a Seventh-day Adventist?] |
| 13. The Remnant and its Mission | Q76g/Q83g The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days a REMNANT has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Q77/Q94 In my thinking, the three angel's message of Revelation 14:6-12 is ... [Q69/Q78/Q89 Do you think there is a natural conflict between being a devout religious person and living in a modern society, or don't you think so?] [Q62n When you get right down to it, there are only two kinds of people in the world: the righteous, who will be rewarded by God, and the rest, who will not] Q53 Which statement comes closest to your own views even if neither is exactly right? My religion is the one, true faith leading to eternal life OR Many religions can lead to eternal life. |
| 18. The Gift of Prophecy | Q76h/Q93h ELLEN G. WHITE is an inspired messenger to the Adventist church |

| Heading of Fundamen-tal Belief | Question(s) |
|--|---|
| 19. [The Law of God] | [(Goal of School) Q2m Put into practice the teachings of the Adventist Church] [Q86e There are clear and absolute standards for what is right and wrong] [(Negative) Q62i I will not get to heaven unless I obey God's law] [Q48/Q70/Q88 When it comes to questions of right and wrong, which of the following do you look to] |
| 20. The Sabbath | Q76b/Q93b The seventh day of the week is the SABBATH according to the Bible |
| 21. Stewardship | Q79/Q98 In the last 12 months, as a percentage of my income, I estimate that I have given as tithe Q80 I know that God has blessed me because I return tithe Q43/Q89i If I were to total it all up, between gifts to charities and giving to my church (e.g. tithes and offerings), I donate approximately the following percentage of my income: |
| 22. Christian Behavior | Q76c & Q93c Adventist standards in DIET Q63a/Q87a Illegal drugs Q63b/Q87b Eating meat Q63c/Q87c Dancing Q63d/Q87d Alcohol (e.g. beer, wine, spirits, etc.) Q63e/Q87e Caffeinated drinks (e.g. Tea Coffee, Coca Cola, Red Bull, etc.) Q63f/Q87f Smoking |
| 24. Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary | Q76f/Q93f The INVESTIGATIVE JUDGMENT beginning in 1844 |
| 25. Second Coming of Christ | Q62m/Q86f Jesus will return to earth a second time (Goal of Church) Q5h Prepare people for the soon return of Jesus Q62h I expect the world as we know it to end in the near future Q76e/Q93e The Adventist church's interpretation of END-TIME PROPHECIES Q86d I expect the world as we know it to end in the near future and, in any case, within the next 20 years or so |
| 27. Millennium | Q76i/Q93i After the millennium, God will restore the earth as a home for the righteous who were resurrected or who were alive at his coming |
| 28. [New Earth] | [Q62d I will make it to heaven only if I have a personal relationship with Jesus] [(Negative) Q62i I will not get to heaven unless I obey God's law] |

As may be observed from Table 16.1, all of the 28 fundamental beliefs may be linked to one or more of the questions in the survey, although it must be admitted, some are only covered in an indirect or cursory manner. For example, less attention was given to the first three paragraphs – God, the Son and the Holy Spirit –than to matters of personal salvation and spiritual practice. However it is evident from Table 16.1 that there are topics that did receive significant attention. Topics such as 9. Creation, 10. Experience of Salvation, 11. Growing in Christ, 13. The Remnant and its Mission; 21. Stewardship,

22. Christian Behavior, and 25. Second Coming of Christ are all associated with several survey questions. A chapter has already been devoted to six of these topics:

- Some questions relating to Fundamental Beliefs 11 (Growing in Christ) and 21 (Stewardship) have been considered in Chapter 12 (“Practices of SDA Spirituality”) which included a discussion of tithing practices and total giving patterns
- Questions that relate to Fundamental Beliefs 10 (Experience of Salvation) and 19 (The Law of God) have been discussed in Chapter 13 (“Beliefs about Personal Salvation ...”)
- Questions that relate to Fundamental Belief 1 (Holy Scriptures) have been considered in Chapter 14 (“Teachers’ Understanding of Scripture and Authority”).
- Questions relating to Fundamental Belief 25 (Second Coming of Christ) are reported in Chapter 15 (“NAD Teachers’ Perception of Adventist Eschatology”).

There are four Fundamental Beliefs that have clusters of questions associated with them that have not been treated in a full chapter in the book. They are 6. Creation; 11. Growing in Christ; 13. The Remnant and its Mission; and 22. Christian Behavior. Of these, it has not proved possible to correct a significant coding error associated with Questions 63a to 63f and 87a to 87f in time for this publication. These are questions associated with 22. Christian Behavior, so it will not be possible to consider this cluster of questions beyond noting the responses to Questions 76c and 93c, “Adventist standards in diet” (see Table 16.6).

Attention will now be given to some of the questions relating to the Fundamental Beliefs 11. Growing in Christ, 6. Creation; and 13. The Remnant and its Mission.

Results Relating to Fundamental Belief 11. Growing in Christ

Given that Fundamental Belief “11. Growing in Christ,” was the one entirely new paragraph that has been added to the Fundamental Beliefs since 1980, it is worth citing it in full.

11. Growing in Christ

By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us. Continually committed to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we are set free from the burden of our past deeds. No longer do we live in the darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness of our former way of life. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the Church. We are also called to follow Christ's example by compassionately ministering to the physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of humanity. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience. (1 Chron. 29:11; Ps. 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Matt. 20:25–28; 25:31–46; Luke 10:17–20; John 20:21; Rom. 8:38, 39; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Gal. 5:22–25; Eph. 5:19, 20; 6:12–18; Phil. 3:7–4; Col. 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; 1 Thess. 5:16–18, 23; Heb. 10:25; James 1:27; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 1 John 4:4.) (28 Fundamental Beliefs, 2015)

Fundamental Belief 11 covers a wide variety of matters relating to the Christian life. It touches on daily prayer, meditating on the Bible, church attendance, service to others, and participating in the mission of the church. These are all matters that have already been covered in Chapter 12, “Practices of SDA Spirituality.”

There is another major theme in Fundamental Belief 11, though, that relates to demonic spirits and evil forces, or the action of the miraculous in the life of the believer. These were tested by several questions in the survey.

- Q50b Angels and demons are active in the world
- [Negative] Q62l The Devil or Satan is not a living being but is a symbol of evil

- Q50a Miracles still occur today as in ancient times
- Q51 Have you ever received a definite answer to a specific prayer request?
- C52. Have you ever experienced or witnessed a divine healing of an illness or injury?

Questions 50a, 50b and 62l are all associated with a Likert scale that provides the options shown in Table 16.2 (below) and thus responses to these questions can be treated in one Table (see Table 16.2).

**Table 16.2 Questions Relevant to
Fundamental Belief 11. Growth in Christ**

| | Q50b Demons | | Q62l Devil sym-bol only | | Q50a Miracles Occur | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % |
| I really don't know | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1.4 | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly disagree | 14 | 7.2 | 121 | 84.0 | 18 | 9.2 |
| Disagree more than agree | 2 | 1.0 | 12 | 8.3 | 3 | 1.5 |
| Agree more than disagree | 20 | 10.3 | 4 | 2.8 | 36 | 18.5 |
| Strongly agree | 159 | 81.5 | 5 | 3.5 | 138 | 70.8 |
| Total | 195 | 100.0 | 144 | 100.0 | 195 | 100.0 |

From Table 16.2 one might conclude that teachers in Adventist Schools in the NAD have a clear belief in the Devil (92% disagree or strongly disagree that the Devil is but a symbol), and in angels and demons (92% agree or strongly agree that they exist). Although 9% strongly disagreed, a clear majority of teachers (89%) agreed or strongly agreed that miracles still can occur today as they did in ancient times. The teachers, then, show evidence of a strong belief in the supernatural and the ability of the supernatural to intervene in everyday life through miracles.

Questions 51 and 52 asked respondents to choose an answer from the following alternatives, “Yes, No, Do not know.”

Table 16.3 Additional Questions Relevant to Fundamental Belief 11. Growth in Christ

| | Q50b Demons | | Q62I Devil symbol only | |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % |
| Yes | 189 | 96.4 | 99 | 50.5 |
| No | 3 | 1.5 | 64 | 32.7 |
| Do not know | 4 | 2.0 | 33 | 16.8 |
| Total | 196 | 100.0 | 196 | 100.0 |

Teachers not only believed that miracles were possible, they had almost all experienced an answer to prayer (96.4%), and just over half of them had observed a sick person recover their health and attributed the recovery to divine healing.

Teachers not only believe in the existence of supernatural beings such as the devil and good and evil angels, they expect to experience the supernatural intervening in their life for good. They not only expect supernatural intervention, almost all of them state that they have experienced it.

Results: 6. Creation

[Editor’s note: Dr David Trim, the director of the Archives, Statistics and Research Office of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, suggested that a copy of this email exchange be included as an introduction to the analysis of the responses by teachers in Adventist Schools in the NAD to questions that relate to creation.]

On 29 Dec 2019, at 01:59, Rob McIver wrote:

Dear Arne and Larry,

Attached you will find a first draft of a chapter that I expect will end up in the book, “Educating for Service and Mission: Teachers in Seventh-day Adventist Schools in North America and Their Perceptions of Mission.”

I would like your advice on the section in the book about fundamental belief 6. Creation. My intention had originally been to include in the main text a report only on Question 62p/86h: “I believe God created the world.” A massive 98.3% of respondents agreed with this statement. The data for the other questions on creation I was going to leave in Appendix B and make no comment on them in the main text. These questions are:

- Q62q I believe God created the world in exactly six days of 24 hours each
- Q62r I believe God created the world in the recent past (e.g. within the last 6,000 to 15,000 years)
- Q62s I believe the world is millions of years old
- Q62t Evolution is the best explanation for the origins of human life on earth

But when I looked at the results, I was very much impressed by how many of the teachers subscribed to the idea that creation was in the recent past, that God created

in 6 days of 24 hours, and that the vast majority of them strongly reject evolution and the idea that the world is millions of years old.

Of course, it might be a case of the glass being half full rather than half empty. 80% agree with the short chronology -- for me that is a remarkably high number. Others may not think so.

My inclination, now that I have gone to the effort of writing up these questions, is to leave the section on creation in chapter 16. But I thought I should check with you to see if you are comfortable with what you are seeing (or at worst, only mildly uncomfortable).

Let me know what you think. I can go back to my original intention of only reporting them in Appendix B if you feel strongly that I should.

By the way, I was astonished (in a very good way) by the amount of unanimity around the 28 fundamental beliefs found among the teachers. I said so in the chapter too!

...

Best wishes,

Rob

Robert K. McIver, PhD
Professor, Avondale Seminary
Director Scripture Spirituality and Society Research Centre
Editor, Avondale Academic Press
Avondale University College

From: Larry Blackmer
Sent: Sunday, 29 December 2019 6:15 PM
Subject: RE: Your advice requested

Rob,

I feel good about the numbers. We need to own who we are and it might be a small group that either is not with us on creation or has been educated in public education. There has been some controversy surrounding this belief in the past ten years among many of the teachers/younger teachers. Can you tease that out regarding age and the non-belief in the creation story? I am totally in favor of publishing what you have. Just my thoughts, but I am a has-been—listen to Arne on this ... he will get the flack if there is any. Looks good my friend!

Larry Blackmer, Ed. D.
Retired NAD Educator

From: Arne Nielsen
Sent: Monday, 30 December 2019 1:17 AM
Subject: RE: Your advice requested

Thank you, Rob and Larry, for your observations. This data serves our Adventist families, churches, and schools very well. All three are significant contributors to the knowledge base of our youth, young adults, and employees/workers. Overall, I am

not surprised by the results and expected significant support for traditional Adventist viewpoints on the creation question (s). I believe we have room in the “tent” for those 20% who may have slightly different ideas, and a great checks/balances system in place to keep the 20% from going too far astray.

Looking forward to the published results.

Season’s greetings,

Arne Nielsen

VP for Education

Fundamental Belief number 6 reads as follows:

6. Creation

God has revealed in Scripture the authentic and historical account of His creative activity. He created the universe, and in a recent six-day creation the Lord made “the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them” and rested on the seventh day. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of the work He performed and completed during six literal days that together with the Sabbath constituted the same unit of time that we call a week today. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was “very good,” declaring the glory of God. (Gen. 1-2; 5; 11; Exod. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Isa. 45:12, 18; Acts 17:24; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2; 11:3; Rev. 10:6; 14:7.) (28 Fundamental Beliefs, 2015)

The demand that creation science be taught alongside the theory of evolution in schools has for many years been a topic of intense public debate in North America. Nor does the debate appear to be subsiding (e.g. Scott, 2019, p. 1034–35; Thorpe, 2018, *passim* but especially p. 14–17).

Given the topicality of the debate about creationism (see Trim, forthcoming), five separate questions were added to the survey that deal with creation and creationism in one way or other. The words in bold are used in the accompanying tables to identify the question.

They are:

- Q62p/Q86h I believe **God created** the world
- Q62q I believe God created the world in exactly **six days** of 24 hours each
- Q62r I believe God created the world in the **recent past** (e.g. within the last 6,000 to 15,000 years)
- Q62s I believe the world is **millions of years** old
- Q62t **Evolution** is the best explanation for the origins of human life on earth

Between them, these questions test whether teachers believe in what conservative Christians see as the biblical description of creation. It is perhaps worth noting that fundamental belief number six only speaks of six days and does not specify the period of 24 hours. Nor does it mention a figure of 6,000 years as the time elapsed since creation. The survey also had two negatively weighted questions on creation, testing whether teachers believed that the world is millions of years old, and whether they thought evolution is a good explanation for the origins of human life on earth. The teachers’ responses may be observed in Tables 16.4 and 16.5.

**Table 16.4 Questions Relevant to
Fundamental Belief 6. Creation**

| | Q62p/Q86h God Created | | Q62q Six Days | | Q62r Recent Past | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % |
| I really don’t know | 1 | .03 | 8 | 5.6 | 5 | 3.5 |
| Strongly disagree | 0 | 0 | 5 | 3.5 | 19 | 13.3 |
| Disagree more than agree | 1 | 0.3 | 2 | 1.4 | 3 | 2.1 |
| Agree more than disagree | 3 | 1.0 | 16 | 11.2 | 12 | 8.4 |
| Strongly agree | 288 | 98.3 | 112 | 78.3 | 104 | 72.7 |
| Total | 293 | 100.0 | 143 | 100.0 | 143 | 100.0 |

Table 16.5 Negative Questions Relevant to Fundamental Belief 6. Creation

| | Q62s Millions of Years | | 62t Evolution | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % |
| I really don't know | 10 | 7.0 | 2 | 1.4 |
| Strongly disagree | 102 | 71.8 | 128 | 90.1 |
| Disagree more than agree | 18 | 12.7 | 9 | 6.3 |
| Agree more than disagree | 9 | 6.3 | 1 | 0.7 |
| Strongly agree | 3 | 2.1 | 2 | 1.4 |
| Total | 142 | 100.0 | 142 | 100.0 |

It may be observed in Table 16.4 that an overwhelming majority of teachers in Adventist schools in the NAD believe that God created the world (98% strongly agree). When the details of this belief are teased out, it is apparent that more than 79% strongly agree or agree that the world was created in six days of 24 hours, and that this event took place as recently as 6,000 years ago (80% strongly agree or agree). Over 96% of teachers either strongly disagree or disagree that the theory of evolution is the best explanation of the origin of human life on earth, and 83.5% do not think that the world is millions of years old. From these data it appears to be true to say that the teachers fully support creationism, most of them also support a literal reading of a day of creation being 24 hours and believe that creation took place about 6,000 years ago.

Results: 13. Remnant

Fundamental Belief “13. The Remnant and Its Mission,” reads as follows:

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Dan. 7:9-14; Isa. 1:9;

11:11; Jer. 23:3; Mic. 2:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 4:17; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Jude 3, 14; Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4.) (28 Fundamental Beliefs, 2015)

Two of the questions relating to Remnant in the survey have already been discussed in Chapter 5 (Questions 76/83 and 77/94). Question 76 in Branch D, which is repeated in Question 83 in Branch E, was deliberately written to reflect the wording of Fundamental Belief 13. It asked participants whether or not they agreed that “The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days a REMNANT has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” From earlier discussion in Chapter 15 (see Table 15.5), it is clear that most teachers accept the concept of the Remnant: 74.5% embrace it wholeheartedly and another 13% assent to it, a combined total of 87.5% of respondents.

Fundamental belief 13 also explicitly mentions the three angels of Revelation chapter 14. The three angels’ messages were taken as a shorthand for the unique message of Seventh-day Adventists by the pioneers of the SDA Church. It was decided to test whether this concept had persisted into the present day with Question 77 in Branch D (repeated as Question 94 in Branch E):

Q77/Q94 In my thinking, the three angel’s message of Revelation 14:6-12 is (a) The context in which the Adventist Church should proclaim the Gospel; (b) Part of the rhetoric of Church members in a previous generation, but no longer relevant to today’s Church; (c) Something about which I have only vague awareness; (d) I really cannot remember hearing or learning about the Three Angel’s Message of Revelation 14:6-12; (e) This question is not relevant to me

The responses to his question have already been discussed. From the discussion in Chapter 15 (see Table 15.8), it is clear that a large majority (89.7%) of teachers think that the three angels’ messages of Rev 14:6–12 is “the context in which the Adventist Church should proclaim the eternal gospel.”

The remaining questions in the survey that deal with the concept of remnant test various ways in which the concept is capable of being misunderstood. For example, it is possible to understand the idea of remnant to imply that those who are not part of the group of believers are lost. Many of the ex-Millerites who were disappointed when

Jesus failed to return in 1844 considered that they had done their duty by warning the world that Jesus would soon return, and concluded that there was no further need to try to persuade others to join them as they awaited the soon return of their Lord. Using metaphorically the language of the shut door found in Matt 25:10, they said to each other that the door of probation had shut (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000, p. 53–54, 67). They had little doubt that they consisted of the group who would be saved when Jesus did return, while others would miss out. With the passing of time, further study of Scripture (Trim, 2018, p. 135, 136), and the addition of new converts who sought to join their number, gradually these ex-Millerites were weaned from the “Shut Door Theory.” But they illustrate a pitfall which is applicable to the Seventh-day Adventist Church if it identifies itself too closely with the concept that it is the faithful remnant. The conclusion may be, “I can only be saved through the Church,” a statement found as Question 62k in Branch C. It should be noted in passing that Fundamental Belief 13 is worded carefully in order to avoid making a clear identification of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the remnant. It must be admitted, though, that most SDAs would recognize themselves in the language that describes the remnant: “a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent” (28 Fundamental Beliefs 2015, #13). The phrase, “commandments of God” (Rev 12:17) is understood by Adventists to point particularly to the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, and the judgment hour is related to the understanding of pre-advent judgment that grows out of SDA interpretation of Daniel 8:14 (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000, p. 59–61; Stefanovic, 2007, p. 309–12, 323–25). Participants in the survey were near unanimous in rejecting the idea that “I can only be saved through the Church.” Of the 144 participants who answered this question, 78% (112) strongly disagreed and 19% (27) disagreed more than agreed. By way of contrast, only 3.5% (5) respondents strongly agreed with the statement (see Table B.113 in Appendix B).

A similar concept was tested by Question 53, which asked, “Which statement comes closest to your own views even if neither is exactly right?: My religion is the one, true faith leading to eternal life OR Many religions can lead to eternal life.” Of the 192 participants who

answered this question, 71 (37%) agreed that “My religion is the one, true faith leading to eternal life.” The other 121 (63%) took the option which suggested that “Many religions can lead to eternal life” (see Table B.113 in Appendix B).

Another question (Question 54) tested the flexibility that the participants felt towards various interpretations of the teachings of the church. It asked, “Which statement comes closer to your own views even if neither is exactly right?: There is only ONE true way to interpret the teachings of my religion OR There is MORE than one true way to interpret the teachings of my religion.” Of the 187 respondents, 55 (or 29%) said there is only ONE way to interpret the teachings of their religion, while the rest, 71% suggested that there was more than one way (see Table B.114 in Appendix B).

Q62n in Branch C tested for a tendency to divide humankind into good and bad: “When you get right down to it, there are only two kinds of people in the world: the righteous, who will be rewarded by God, and the rest, who will not.” Of the 143 participants who answered this question, 112 (78%) strongly agreed or agreed with this question (see Table B.102 in Appendix B).

Another question which measured the “them versus us” attitude of teachers was repeated in Branches C, D and E as Questions 69, 78, and 89: “Do you think there is a natural conflict between being a devout religious person and living in a modern society, or don’t you think so?” The wording of this question grew out of the differences between a sect and a church as defined by Rodney Stark and Roger Finke: “Definition 26. Churches are religious bodies in relatively lower tension with their surroundings. Definition 27. Sects are religious bodies in relatively higher tension with their surroundings” (Stark & Finke, 2000, p. 143–44). The wording was designed to test whether the participants considered themselves to be in tension with wider society. Of the 461 respondents who answered this question, 180 (or 39%) said that “... there is a lot of conflict” and an additional 217 (47%) said that “... there is some conflict.” Only 54 (12%) did not think there was any conflict, and 7 (1.5%) did not know how to answer the question (see Table B.24 in Appendix B).

How, then, might we answer the question, “How sectarian are the teachers in Adventist schools in the NAD?” Their responses to the

questions analyzed in the previous few paragraphs provide a first-order answer to this question. As a group they are clear that it is not necessary to belong to the SDA Church to be saved. This might indicate a more open attitude than one might expect of a sectarian viewpoint. On the other hand, about three quarters of them considered that there were only two kinds of people in the world, the righteous, and those who are not. Over one third of them thought that their religion was the only way to eternal life, and about the same number perceived that there was a high tension between themselves as observant Christians and the society in which they live.

Adventist teachers in the NAD have a clear sense that the church they belong to is significant and important. They perceive that there is a difference between themselves and wider society. They are not exclusive, in that they do not believe only fellow church members can be saved. They do not claim to be the sole way to heaven. But they are comfortable with being part of a special group of believers. Does this make them sectarian? If there was a sliding scale between not sectarian and strongly sectarian, or, to use the definitions of Stark and Finke, between Church and Sect, they would fit somewhere in the middle.

Results: The 28

It is appropriate now to try to gain some perspective on the relationship between the teachers in Adventist schools in the NAD and the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the SDA Church. This question has been addressed in detail in several chapters of this book. But perhaps it might be of benefit to consider the whole range of the Fundamental Beliefs at once. An attempt to do so has been made in Table 16.6. In that table, alongside of the heading for the Fundamental Belief (found in the column with the label, “Heading”), one question has been taken to represent that particular fundamental belief, and a report is made of the percentage of those who assent to the question. Assent was taken to include the responses, “strongly agree”, “agree”, “embrace it wholeheartedly”, “accept it because the church teaches it” and “accept it because I think it is probably correct”. These percentages are found in the column in Table 16.6 labelled “%.” The final column, headed “Table,” provides the reference to the Table that has the data for that question. With only one exception, these tables are found in Appendix B. Any Table that starts with “B.” will be found in Appendix B.

Table 16.6 Teachers and the 28 Fundamental Beliefs

| Heading of Fundamental Belief | Question(s) | % | Table |
|---|--|----------|--------------|
| 1. [Holy Scriptures] | [Q65/Q92 ... the Bible is ... the work of people who were inspired by God and who, though expressing their message in terms of their own time and place[, expressed eternal truths] | 96.9 | 14.2 |
| 2. Trinity | Q62o/Q86g I believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (i.e. I believe in the doctrine of the Trinity) | 97.6 | B.103 |
| 3. Father | Q62b/Q86a I believe in a personal God who seeks a relationship with human beings | 98.3 | B.90 |
| 4. Son | Q62c/Q86b Jesus Christ is the Son of God | 98.6 | B.91 |
| 5. [Holy Spirit] | [Q62o/Q86g I believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (i.e. I believe in the doctrine of the Trinity)] | 97.6 | B.103 |
| 6. Creation | Q62p/Q86h I believe God created the world | 99.3 | B.104 |
| 7. Nature of Man | Q76d/Q93d When a person dies their body remains in the grave and their soul sleeps until the resurrection | 96.5 | B.119 |
| 8. Great Controversy | Q76a/Q93a All humanity is involved in a GREAT CONTROVERSY between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His love, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe | 97.2 | B.116 |
| [9. Life, death and resurrection of Christ] | [Q62g I believe that Jesus was born of a virgin] | 96.5 | B.95 |
| 10. Experience of salvation | Q62f/Q86c I am saved the moment I believe and accept what Jesus has done for me | 92.0 | B.94 |
| 11. Growing in Christ | Q56a Pray outside of attending religious services \geq daily | 94.3 | B.79 |
| 13. The Remnant and its Mission | Q76g/Q83g The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days a REMNANT has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus | 87.4 | B.122 |
| 18. The Gift of Prophecy | Q76h/Q93h ELLEN G. WHITE as an inspired messenger to the Adventist church | 94.0 | B.123 |
| 19. [The Law of God] | [Q86e There are clear and absolute standards for what is right and wrong] | 91.2 | B.130 |
| 20. The Sabbath | Q76b/Q93b The seventh day of the week is the SABBATH according to the Bible | 99.1 | B.117 |

| Heading of Fundamental Belief | Question(s) | % | Table |
|--|---|------|-------|
| 21. Stewardship | Q79/Q98 In the last 12 months, as a percentage of my income, I esti-mate that I have given as tithe $\geq 10\%$ of income | 87.8 | B.126 |
| 22. Christian Behavior | Q76c/Q93c Adventist standards in DIET | 84.6 | B.118 |
| 24. Christ’s Ministry in the Heavenly Sanc-tuary | Q76f/Q93f The INVESTIGATIVE JUDGMENT beginning in 1844 | 86.2 | B.121 |
| 25. Second Coming of Christ | Q62m/Q86f Jesus will return to earth a second time | 98.0 | B.101 |
| 27. Millennium | Q76i/Q93i After the millennium, God will restore the earth as a home for the righteous who were resurrected or who were alive at his coming | 97.8 | B.124 |
| 28. [New Earth] | [Q76e/Q93e The Adventist church’s interpretation of END-TIME PROPHECIES] | 86.3 | B.120 |

That individuals who live in different parts of North America, who have different life circumstances, different levels of education and different levels of responsibility, can agree so widely on a set of beliefs is truly remarkable. Humans will always have differences of opinion, and Americans are well known for their independence. Yet 16 of the 28 fundamental beliefs are believed by more than 90% of the respondents (more than 97% assented to nine of them). More than 80% of the participants were in agreement with all of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs. It is worth noting that in a couple of these instances, the “bar” for measuring agreement with that belief was set high – prayer was to be daily (Fundamental 11), and the proportion of income given as tithe was set at greater than or equal to 10% of income.

On the whole, then, it is plain that teachers in the Adventist Schools in the NAD believe in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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